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Tribal Music of Australia

Recorded and with Notes by A. P. Elkin

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M
1840
T822
1953

MUSIC LP

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DESCRIPTIVE NOTES ARE INSIDE POCKET

Tribal Music of Australia

SIDE I

- Band 1. DJEDBANG-ARI SONGS (Yirkalla District)
- Band 2. DJEDBANG-ARI (Rirredjng-o)
- Band 3. DJEDBANG-ARI
- Band 4. WADAMIRI
- Band 5. WADAMIRI
- Band 6. MARAIAN CHANT
- Band 7. DIDJERIDU
- Band 8. GUNBORG SINGING

SIDE II

- Band 1. CLOUD CHANT
- Band 2. DJERAG
- Band 3. BRINKIN WONGGA
- Band 4. DJARADA
- Band 5. NYINDI-YINDI CORROBOREE
- Band 6. SACRED SONG

TRIBAL MUSIC OF AUSTRALIA

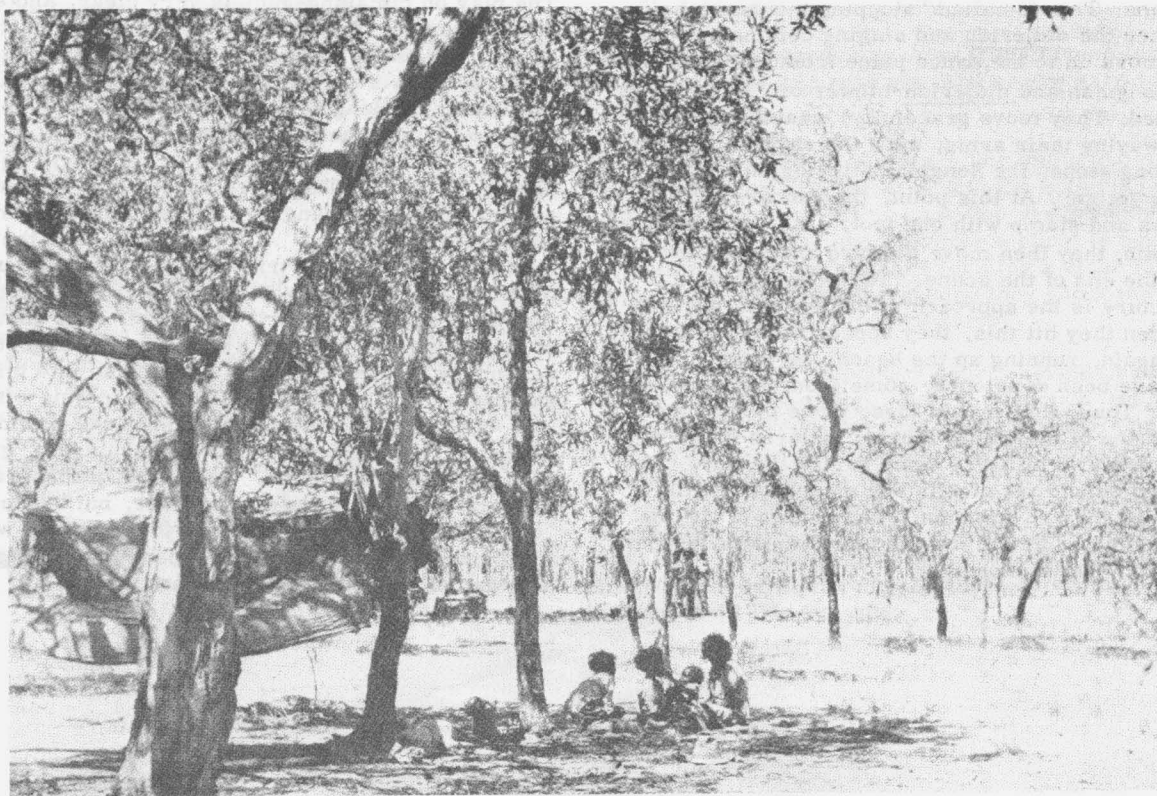
Introduction and Notes By A. P. Elkin

Historically and geographically the northern Peninsula of the Northern Territory of Australia, that is, the part north of the lower Victoria River and of the Roper River, was known as Arnhem Land. The custom has grown up, however, of limiting that designation to the region commencing about twenty miles or so east of the Darwin-Katherine road, and north of the Roper. The aboriginal tribes in the vicinity of the road and in most of the area between it and the west coast of the peninsula have experienced sixty and more years of contact with European (and in the past Chinese) settlements, mining and other. Their way of life was disturbed and they have seriously decreased in numbers, except in such a secluded area as Port Keats. On the other hand, at Delissaville, across the harbor from Darwin, there are signs of recovery. Most of the natives in this western region now depend largely on employment by Europeans for their living. East

of the road, however, except on the southern and western fringes, this is not so. Religious Missions encourage a settled life, but generally speaking, the aborigines there are living in their old semi-nomadic way of life, depending on food-gathering, hunting and fishing for a living. They consist of a dozen or more tribes, with distinct languages, and recognized territories. Groups move about a lot according to family and clan rules, and especially to take part in great ceremonies, and in song and dance.

Although the soil is only good in patches, the country provides an adequate and certain supply of food for the aborigines. There is no struggle for life as in Australia's arid and desert zones. This fact can be correlated with the great amount of time which is given to social and ceremonial occasions, and to the development of art. Bark and rock-painting have reached a standard far beyond that attained further south. Carving in wood and the making of naturalistic composite figures for ceremonies were also practised. Their sacred myths are preserved in long cycles of chants, the words of which are rich in poetic feeling and imagery. Dancing, especially of the ballet type, has been remarkably developed; and above all, this region outshines all others in its music. Each main group has its "Songman", the owner (inheritor or composer) of the songs and of the dances which go with them, and "master of ceremonies". No one can sing his songs without his permission. The presence of a Songman in a camp means social life, joy, and, more deeply, being caught up in the traditions and life of the heroic past.

Encampment near Adelaide River, Northern Territory



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In this region, there are many patterns of song and of sacred chant, a few of which are illustrated in this collection. At least, it is easy to pick out at once the far western, the north-western, the southern and the north-eastern types. So, too, various types of sacred chanting--some of it secret--are clearly distinguished.

The chief musical instruments are the didjeridu (a hollow wooden or bamboo tube without stops, which is blown) and a pair of tapping or rhythm sticks, which the Songman uses. In some chants, of southern origin, neither of these are employed; instead the singers, often several singing in unison, tap and rattle pairs of boomerangs. Indeed, boomerangs have been imported into this region as musical percussion instruments.

In the north and north-east there is only one Songman in one performance, but if there are two or three (the most I have heard in local songs) they sing in the style of a round, and at times, of a fugue, and so provide harmony. This is explained with reference to the examples.

The following pieces are selected from fourteen hours of material obtained in the field in 1949 and 1952 on wire and tape recorders, and later transferred to master discs. They were recorded in the open air, as things happened, mostly at night.

NOTES ON THE RECORDINGS

SIDE I, BAND I: These three pieces are examples of the Djedbang-ari. This is a special form of song and dance from the Yirkalla district in the far north-east of Arnhem land. A usual feature of the structure is a break in the singing half-way through a stanza and dance scene. This is called "stopping the dance, half-way". When the didjeridu and singing commence, the dancers move on to the dance place from the side opposite the Songman and didjeridu-blower or "Puller", as he is called. They move gracefully, weaving in and out and swaying their arms, until the rhythm changes, and the song stops, the Songman uttering only such sounds as ge: ge:. At this point, the dancers stop in their steps and stamp with one foot, until the Songman starts again; they then move forward and reach the latter at the end of the scene. The primary basis of this structure is the approach of the waves to the sea-shore; when they hit this, they appear to stop and then to go on again, running up the beach. A variety of themes have been developed, some from non-aboriginal subjects. Thus, the first of these three pieces is an interpretation of the comic moving pictures which a Songman saw at a military camp during the war. The pictures go on and yet stop in one place; moreover, after pauses they go on again. The change of rhythm in the middle and at the end to mark the stops is very pronounced. The words are:

gome gade lima: li:ma: je je je
comic "run" pictures

gome gade gome gani lima li:ma je je je

(d)jedba bunguraia (d)jedba bunguraia nororo
je je je

gome gani gome gani lima lima je je je

The second of these three songs is about a small bird which lays a little egg, and flies away calling tau tau. The song is a play on the words:

tabo tabo naberi wandinaia jimunguni
bird egg small small

(galgiri or) naberi wandinaia tabida-baii
egg small bird

tau tau tau
the bird's call

The rhythm of the didjeridu is especially good, with its syncopated effects. The tau tau tau and a noticeable break in the rhythm of the didjeridu mark the 'half-way stop' of the Djedbang-ari pattern. In later verses the dancers can be heard stamping si-si-ing and uttering trills.

The third piece in this band refers to a snake moving in the water, where it bites a little bird, after which it crawls into a hole and sleeps. The words are:

nimaiang-gudi nimaiang-gudi
nibulari raidjing-ambo
wai wai bidi-bidi gunja
lungana lungana lurijun-manda

The play on nimaiang-gudi is very clear, and also on raidjing-ambo. Two persons are tapping the rhythm sticks, and some young lads join in the singing. The half-way stop is not as pronounced as usual, but is marked by the lengthening of two beats, a couple of bars apart, and the two shouts.

SIDE I, BAND 2: These two verses are excellent examples of the Djedbang-ari; the structure of which was described above. In this case the Songman is a Riredjing-o "tribesman" from the country of origin of the Djedbang-ari. The "half-way stop" and the finish are very clearly indicated. The abruptness of the Songman's calls or ejaculations, suggest the secondary pattern which has been taken into this song and dance form. During the War, Riredjing-o men saw service-men drilling, and heard the commands to march, halt, mark time and march again, given in ultra-staccato fashion. So in the Djedbang-ari the dancers move on to the dance-place, but at the "command" stop and mark time (by stamping with one foot) and then at the next "command", the Songman's high explosive note, move forward again.

Because of the importance and strength of the didjeridu, the words can hardly be heard, except for the repeated wol-e in the second verse, followed by dibang-mala. These two verses are part of a long series in which the group-names (bulain, nagaritj and others) are called of dancers who take it in turn to remain on the edge of the dance-place until with the second half of each verse and scene, they run on and join the others. The words express sorrow for the person left out, and then call him in.

SIDE I, BAND 3: Djedbang-ari.

SIDE I, BAND 4: Wadamiri Song. The Wadamiri or Waramiri series of songs come from a north-eastern Arnhem Land Island and mainland linguistic group of that name, and from a ceremonial and social half of the tribe which is always associated with the introduction of foreign customs and objects. Some of the songs are about aeroplanes, steam boats, cards, tobacco and so on. This Wadamiri is an example of a "foreign" subject-- tobacco. This was brought to Arnhem Land by the Macassars before the time of European settlement. So too was the "Malay" pipe. The song, of which four verses are given, refers to a person worrying for the white man's sweet tobacco, cutting the paper to get at it, smoking, inhaling and blowing the smoke away, and then putting the tobacco under the pillow and going to sleep.

<u>Bamandara:</u> ceremony	<u>ga: djala</u> ceremony	
<u>worali</u> smoking	<u>wagu-gu</u> worrying(for)	<u>barupu</u> sweet tobacco
<u>bung-a-miri</u> cut the paper	<u>djalduruna</u> blow smoke away	
<u>gumur</u> chest	<u>garamandu</u> tobacco-maker	<u>ninana</u> sit
<u>wura-mala</u> white men	<u>nilinju</u> we two	<u>jaguru</u> sleep

SIDE I, BAND 5: Wadamiri. The sample here is based on an indigenous subject, the ground wasp. The song, of which three verses are given, tells how this insect makes a hole in the ground in which it sleeps on a pillow. Then to the music of a sacred ceremony, it comes out of the hole, stands, runs, and flies away. The first word, woiju-woiju (waju) wasp, is clear. The general text of which several words can be heard distinctly, runs:



<u>morai</u> wasp	<u>gama-lili</u> makes hole	<u>mindala (-lili)</u> lies on pillow
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<u>lawerigu</u> secret	<u>gaimu-rura</u> ceremony
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<u>woiju-woiju</u> wasp	<u>ngolumba</u> ceremony	<u>dauduruna</u> comes up
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<u>darana</u> stands	<u>wandiri</u> runs	<u>djurung-a</u> dirt
<u>jageroror</u> lies down	<u>gaija</u> flies away	<u>gaija</u>

In the singing, words are often transformed for the sake of rhythm and euphony, and so are hard to follow.

This is a very vigorous song. The didjeridu and sticks together with the si si and the stamping of the dancers, carry the scene on with a great swing. At the beginning of the second verse a shout is heard. This is made by the dancers forming a close ring; all facing in and towards the ground they shout towards the latter, the spirit of "mother earth".

SIDE I, BAND 6: Important secret ceremonies have ended for the afternoon. An old Songman, caught up in the spirit of this Maraian, a kind of "All Souls Festival", commences to sing some sacred chants. The actors, about forty in number, sit around and listen intently. This stanza tells of the fresh water river running in flood down to the sea, slowly here, swiftly there, past the great paper-bark trees standing in the flood. So the desired wet-season is commemorated and heralded, for on it life depends.

The Songman sits and beats time with his two sticks. The words portray the rhythm he gives to them, while the slurring of vowels at the ends of some lines and the rapid enunciation of some phrases are very effective. The singing was regarded as being very good indeed.

i:dala gurbe: dala gur-be: e: e:
fresh water (river)

dala gur-be dala gur-be: i:e:

mung-ur djire:
water tree

mung-uru ninja-gama bambili-we
standing in running water

bambili-we mugu-ma: ba:
slowly

malei-do: e:i:e:

me-dje nji-in-ja-ga-me magur-doro
water floating leaves
wurmilgdje
swiftly

wurmilgdje marar-we-we

munuru-nuru e:ri:
water

SIDE I, BAND 7: The didjeridu. This instrument is played in the far north-west corner of the continent and throughout Arnhem Land and a little to the south of the latter. It consists of a hollow length of wood or bamboo, about four or five feet long, and from two to four inches in diameter. The opening at the mouth is about one and a half to two inches across, but is often larger at the far end. The instrument need not be straight. It may curve a bit, particularly towards the end. A mouth-piece consists of a vegetable gum or of beeswax fixed to the playing end. The noise is produced by blowing in cornet-fashion. There are no stops, and usually only one note is sounded, but a good blower (or "puller" as he is called) also produces a higher note, about a fourth up. The variety of rhythm produced is remarkable, as these examples show.

The "puller" usually sits on the ground with the far end of the instrument resting on the ground. If he stands, an assistant holds the far end. Usually, except when practising, the didjeridu accompanies the Songman who taps out the rhythm with two resounding sticks. However, his rhythm does not always synchronize with the didjeridu or even with his singing, and so we get the effect of rhythm "in depth" and of syncopation.

In the following five samples the didjeridu "puller" was recorded alone, though the Songman's sticks joined in the fifth item, and can be faintly heard in the others.

The first gives a Djedbang-ari rhythm. The half-way "stop" is clear. The second rhythm imitates the movements of a graceful blue-gray bird, with long thin legs, and about four feet high from head to ground. Famous for its group dances, the bird makes a rhythmic noise which is imitated by the "Puller". The third is the accompaniment for the dance and song of a small bird, called moi kandi. It has a high squeak which the Puller reproduces at the same time as he blows his didjeridu. The fourth and fifth provide the fast varied rhythm of the sea-gull song and dance. The songman's sticks are well synchronized with the didjeridu in the fifth.

SIDE I, BAND 8: This is a sample of Gunborg singing, as it is called, in south-western Arnhem Land. Actually this type of song comes from western Arnhem Land, especially Goulburn Island and Oenpelli (the Alligator River region). The Songman in this case was from a little south of the latter. The theme of the Gunborg is gossip. The Songman composes the words on some passing event in social happenings such as in love affairs, but makes the allusions indirect, so as to avoid trouble. Moreover, the words frequently have not only an entirely innocent patent meaning, but also a latent meaning, usually with sexual significance. The sample of which two verses are given, states that the Songman wanted his female cousin, and that they came out (from the camp). He then lit a fire, ate and was satiated, after which he covered himself, for rain was coming up on top (in the sky).

ngalgurung ngadjareni ngarbebmi ngawargmeng
female cousin I wanted we came out I lit a fire

nga-ngun ngaworgmen
I ate I am "full"

manburba jergeme
clothing cover up

ganbargbu mandjeng
on top rain

bedming mandjeng ganbargbun
comes up rain on top

The musical form is interesting. The didjeridu commences, after which the dancers on the side of the dance-place call O: and shout into the ground. The didjeridu then continues and the Songman begins. There are four musical parts in each verse irrespective of the subject, or of variations in the melody. The general characteristic of all the phrasing is a descending glide. In the first three, each part consists of three or more glides, each a phrase of meaning, and each, as a rule, starting and always ending on a lower note than the preceding. The dancers may utter a call or a shout between or during the phrases. The end of the third part seems to be the end of the verse, the decided hand-clapping and final stamp seem to indicate this. But after a pause, a final single glide from the top to the bottom is sung; this is the fourth section of the verse.



Corroboree dance, Wild Man River Station

SIDE II, BAND I: Portions of the Cloud chant in the Riredjing-o language of far north-east Arnhem Land. It is about the clouds which come from the island of the Dead away to the east. The wind blows them along, sometimes as fine flakes, sometimes like the seed which appears when grass or a flower-bud opens, and sometimes as though they are sitting on the sea. It blows them around both sides of Bremer Island, and after beating the water into waves, reaches the Riredjing people, who came from the place of the Cloud, and now feel sorrow for their old-time leader.

Most of the many verses end with a short recitative, that is, the singing continues without sticks or didjeridu. This usually gives the key words of the verse. It is a feature of several types of chants in Arnhem Land. In the singing, too, it will be noticed that in many instances no effort is made to prevent the didjeridu and sticks from drowning out the voice. The latter provides the authoritative background, and is essential, but can be sotto voce. This adds to the difficulty of following the words. The general text commences:

<u>bulong-or</u>	<u>dauwudon</u>	<u>narong</u>	<u>dang-um</u>
cloud	(wind) blowing	along	that

<u>ngalin</u>	<u>bugu</u>	<u>wema-linggan</u>
we	very	sorry here (stop)

<u>jurong-ain</u>	<u>ninging-oin</u>	<u>djinagoi</u>	
we people	belonging	(that) country	
<u>ngali</u>	<u>jurong-o</u>	<u>djaruna</u>	<u>bailma</u>
we	people	song	song
<u>laiang-ani</u>	<u>burung-gali</u>	<u>wata</u>	
'song'	'song'	wind	
<u>narung-an</u>	<u>ngaling-go</u>	<u>bulbulwa</u>	
comes up	own	five clouds	
<u>morogan-ba</u>	<u>njinan</u>	<u>narong</u>	
flower	'set'	along	
<u>ngoili</u>	<u>gapul</u>		
on	water		

SIDE II, BAND 2: A sample of the Djerag or sea-gull series from north-east Arnhem Land. It belongs to the ceremonial "half" of the community which is traditionally responsible for indigenous subjects and object. This is a sea series, and includes such themes as shark, salt-water fish and birds. The example given is about the shark jumping up and cleaving the water as he chases little fish which hurry off between the stones, and big fish which dash off, before his teeth close on them.

<u>marauwa</u>	<u>tjaipila</u>	<u>waptuan</u>
shark	jumps	cleaves

<u>dorjuwan</u>	<u>bandang-a</u>
jumps	chasing fish into the rocks

<u>lindjing-o.</u>	<u>warogan</u>	<u>rerami</u>
"song"	shark	teeth

<u>marauwa</u>	<u>rurdowan</u>
shark	(small fish) rush away

<u>wurubowan</u>	<u>-bowan</u>	<u>-wan</u>
big fish (chased		
by shark)		

<u>wirwiriwan</u>	<u>dirijuwan</u>
go round	jump and run

The "swing" of the didjeridu is particularly good. There are two Songmen, who in the first verse follow on the principle of the round. In the second they are in unison, or almost so.

SIDE II, BAND 3. This is an example of the Brinkin Wongga, or the song pattern (Wongga) of the Brinkin tribes. These belong to the inland country of the Daly River region, which is on the west of Arnhem Land proper, but through intermarriage and trade, the Wongga has spread into the south-west of Arnhem Land proper. This sample is sung by a Maielli or stone-country tribesman of that part, while the didjeridu is played by a Gunwinggu man from further north.

Both the Songman and "Puller" stand all the time; a boy holds the far end of the didjeridu. The melody usually starts on a high note, generally falsetto, and descends. Words are absent, being replaced by syllables. Each song, however, has its name or subject, such as a dead man's spirit, a bird, or as in the example given here, fire. Men around take part, hand-clapping, calling, and dancing.

In the Wongga pattern the Songman sings without beating his rhythm sticks, but when not singing, he beats them in time with the hand-claps of those around. The high sustained monotoned call of the dancers almost gives the effect of harmony. This usually occurs just as the Songman begins on his high note. After he reaches his low note, he pauses and beats his sticks and then utters a long drawn ah! followed by grunts. Finally, in this and in several other types of dances, the dancers give a final "off-stage" call and shout after each scene and verse. It is an acknowledgment of the spirit of "mother" earth whose dust they have raised, a symbol of the life which comes from her.

SIDE II, BAND 4: This is a djarada or love song and refers to the women (djingolo) calling out (bugurungga) as they bathe or swim (ngororong) in the river. The actual words in this stanza are hard to follow, but great rhythm is made of the je je je. The young boys take the lead with much gusto, leaving the Songman to come in on a lower pitch. They begin with a singing prefix, ing.

SIDE II, BAND 5: Part of the Nyindi-yindi corroboree or dance of the Wadjigin people of the coast from Darwin to the lower Daly River. The didjeridu has a distinctly different quality from other didjeridus recorded. The Songman is hard to hear and no meaning could be obtained for the words. Indeed most of it seems to be only syllable-slurring. This corroboree is eminently social. It is marked by much good humour and by virtuoso dancing by individuals. The dancers, after painting up, jump through a smoke fire, and approach the dance-ground shouting and calling with spears held erect. This group is among the best "ballet" dancers of the north. In the extract given here, individuals took turns to dance singly in the midst of the rest, putting great energy into their actions, which were very sharply synchronized with the rhythm of the music. The stamps of the dancers on the bare earth and their calls witness to the energy expended. The wail, given by a leader, is for a distinguished dancer and songman, Mosek, who had died about a year before.

SIDE II, BAND 6: This is a sacred song from a series chanted during an all-night session of the Maraian ceremonies of central Arnhem Land. This constitutes a kind of All Souls Festival. The Shades or Souls of heroes, of natural species, of the dead, and even of absent living persons, are "called up", and rites re-enacting the emergence of the various species from the place of Shades or the "earth-womb" are enacted. The song cycles recall the great heroic and mythical events, and in doing so describe natural species and places with great detail.

This extract is about the barramundi, a large fish.

<u>djirbung-u</u>	<u>reli-reli</u>	<u>guma-dada</u>
barramundi	big shoal	shoulder bone

<u>maial</u>	<u>wiringura</u>	<u>gura</u>	<u>badum</u>	<u>manara</u>
grease(or skin) slips	fish	heart		take out

<u>mulugangga</u>	<u>duru-rudyan</u>
fins	swimming under water

<u>yambo-dari</u>	<u>guba</u>	<u>balinmer</u>	<u>wata</u>
("stands up"	neck	spine (at top of	tail
in water)		backbone)	

nambidjera
moves about

milin-djibara
spine (sticking up
from backbone)

badum
heart

djauari
walk

bari
along

banakdjira
feathers

nguru-gumbia
nose-spoon

wiringura
"throw away"

gura
fish

djiramame
name (of)

garag-muru
sky there

darnana
hovering

djamulu
food

murkun-djurdu
one (garala)

bai-djauwura
two (garala)

gulumburgu
three (galara)

garag-muru
sky - there

garala
spoonbill

muloi-muloi
big flock

garala
spoonbill

muloi-muloi
big flock

garala

These chants are in two series, the responsibility of the two ceremonial moieties or "halves" into which each of these tribes is divided. The preceding chant belongs to the Yiritja moiety, and the next to the Dua moiety. It is about the spoonbill bird. Several verses are required to go through the whole text of the chant:



CREDITS

Photographs by Cyrus Townsend Brady Jr.
Editor: Harold Courlander
Production Director: Moses Asch